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->From the Editor's Keyboard
"~~~~~"

"Saying it like it is!"

I'm probably going to regret saying this, but it hasn't been one of "those weeks" this past week. That's not to say that everything was terrific, but overall it wasn't too bad. Sure, I'm still shaking off the remnants of a nagging cold. And yes, we're supposed to get more snow and sub-freezing temperatures. And it wasn't bad that the bosses were away for the week!

I was quite busy, so I didn't get a chance to do some more research on our trip down memory lane. But, I'll get back on track. If I can shake off this nasty bug. I hope so - I'm getting itchy to start seeing some omen of Spring soon. Winter, I've had enough for one season.

Until next time...

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Retro Roundup Provides Classic Computing News

Have trouble keeping up with the web's numerous classic video game and classic computing news sites? Retro Roundup (<http://www.retroroundup.com>) is a new site that serves as a one-stop source for classic computing and retro video game news. Retro Roundup collects headlines from more than a dozen sites, newsgroups, and other news sources into a single page, including AtariAge and comp.sys.atari.announce.

You can customize the site: click Set As Favorite to move any site to the top of the page, or Remove to hide a site's headlines from view.

<http://www.retroroundup.com>

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING

compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Sorry for missing you last week, but I was a hurtin' pup. Sinus infections are never fun, but this sucker just didn't (doesn't) want to let go.

I'm feeling better now, but not back to normal. The one thing I keep thinking to myself is... "I never got this sick back when I was still smoking". <chuckle>

I just passed 2 years without a cigarette. I still miss them, and I'm always close to picking up a pack. So far I haven't, but you never know.

I saw something in the newspaper last week about an entire generation of 'kids' coming up against criticism for the first time and having a hard time accepting that they could possibly be the object of anything but praise.

I've got a couple of problems with the article, because they went too far in some aspects and not far enough in others.

First of all, it's not ALL kids in their 20's. From reading the article, you get the impression that every twenty-something out there is socially retarded. That's just not the case. I know too many good 'kids' to fall for that. But I HAVE noticed that there seems to be a much higher incidence of socially maladjusted, self-involved "neo-yuppies" who feel entitled.

What surprised me about the article was that anyone was surprised about it. We've spent the past 2 or 3 decades feeling that we were entitled to whatever we wanted. Is it any wonder that our young 'caught the fever'?

I have a hard time believing that this is a new phenomenon. This is probably something that ebbs and flows throughout history and it's only our split-second technology that allows us to see it now. I can picture the same thing happening in ancient Rome, and perhaps even in Babylon before that.

Anyway, I've been complaining about 'neo-yuppies' for quite a while, and I feel some vindication now that someone else has actually noticed it. See that? It really is the small victories in life that make things worthwhile.

Now let's get to the news, hints, tips and info available from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st Newsgroup
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Brian Roland asks about his "clicking" floppy drives:

"All my ST class machines keep an active floppy drive when booting from the hard drive...an endless click till a floppy is shoved in its clicking jaws.

Is there per chance an auto folder utility that'll put drive A: to sleep till it's needed? Know where I might find it if does happen to exist?"

Michael Bernstein tells Brian:

"I remember this problem from my old Ataris. Old TOS versions don't switch the floppy drive off, if they boot from hard disk. I don't know which TOS solves that problem. I think, it was not present in my TOS 1.04.

Many years ago I wrote I auto folder utility for my personal use to solve this problem. If you like to give my program a chance, I can put it on my download page."

Brian replies:

"Yes Michael, I'd much like to try this utility.
Thanks!

My Mega 4 has a Wizztronics TOS 2.06 compatibility plus board, and an XTRA RAM 8 board. The drive light does stay on if booted with an empty floppy drive.

My STacy 4 has TOS 1.4 on a 2 chip set. It behaves the same way.

It seems to me the drive does continue to spin..tho' I might be wrong...I haven't gotten 'that close' to the thing to be sure.

STacy: The less drain on the aging power supply the better. It also has a hard drive in it that's pretty power hungry and runs pretty hot...keeping a floppy in the drive for very long is sure to see it get cooked before its time.

Mega: Again, the power supply is aging. The XTRA RAM also demands quite a few more milliamps than intended from the stock power supply....so the less useless drain of power, I feel the better."

'Jorge' adds:

"Yes, the motor keeps spinning. That's perfectly normal. Actually, that's the reason that the led stays on. TOS waits until motor is off before deselecting the drive (deselecting the drive will turn off the led).

Motor off is handled automatically by the FDC. The FDC turns the motor off signal after being idle for 9 revolutions. But without a disk, the drive will not produce index pulse signals, the FDC will never detect any revolutions, and will keep motor on all the time. If motor stays on, then TOS doesn't deselect the drive and the led stays on.

Whatever utility you get to turn off the led, it should do that only indirectly. If it just deselects the drive then the motor will still keep spinning. So the fix is to reset the FDC and NOT to deselect the drive. Once the FDC turns off the motor TOS will deselect the drive and turn off the led."

'Don' asks about an FPU for his Falcon030:

"Does anyone know if I can use a 68882 33mhz FPU in a Falcon? I have just a plain Falcon no upgrades. I know it should be using a 16mhz but, I have a couple 33mhz that I thought I could use. I'm NOT looking for a increase in performance by using the 33mhz, just a replacement."

Mike Freeman tells Don:

"I have a 33MHz version in mine. Works just fine!"

Mark Bedingfield adds:

"Yup, just plug one in. It uses a PLCC type chip, the socket is under the power supply. FWIR, it is only a 16Mhz FPU on a stock Falcon, so your 33Mhz chip should be fine. Both my Falcons have one. It is just nice to fill the socket."

Brian Roland asks about updating the TOS version in his STacy:

"Anyone know right off the bat if TOS 2.06 works in a STacy? Mine currently has TOS 1.4 on a two chip set as part of the STacy 4 memory board (holds 4 lmb SIMMS and a two chip TOS set).

Main reason I'm considering the upgrade is the built in time delays for drives and whatnot to spin up...of course the other benefits would be nice as well."

Steve Sweet tells Brian:

"That requirement can be met with NoRoach as well as other 3rd party utils."

Stephane Perez posts this about his 'new' MegaST4:

"I have some questions about a Mega ST4 someone gave me and an AT-Speed C-16. Here is a photo of the whole thing :

http://strider.mjjprod.free.fr/_temp_/mega_st_vue_generale.jpg

- Can anyone give me information about the AT-Speed C-16 card? How to plug it, how to run it, which software using, etc.

- What are the two green wires and the kind of power wires (red & black) soldered to the AT-Speed? Here is the picture :

http://strider.mjjprod.free.fr/_temp_/mega_st_atspeed.jpg

- Now about the Mega ST. On the case it is written "Mega ST4" so I presume it is a 4-Meg machine? But I ran several system tools (Sysinfo...) and they all tell me it is a 2-Meg machine! Here is the photo of the motherboard:

http://strider.mjjprod.free.fr/_temp_/mega_st_ram.jpg

- On the same picture, there are 4 free slots (EPROMS?) on the left (below the MC 68000). Do you know what is it?

- Just below the power supply there is a free slot, as you can see on

this picture: http://strider.mjjprod.free.fr/_temp_/mega_st_alim.jpg
The right slot is used to feed the motherboard, but what about the left one? Maybe for feeding the expansion card?

- Last but not least... what's the J17 jumper?

The picture: http://strider.mjjprod.free.fr/_temp_/mega_st_j17.jpg "

Djordje Vukovic tells Stephane:

"This photo [the one showing RAM] indeed shows that all DRAM chips are in place and this should be a 4MB machine. For the upper 2MB to work, the following items should also be completely functional (find and see the schematics): the upper 2MB are the two DRAM rows nearer the centre of the board. There should not be missing any of the 33 ohm resistors near the middle of the front side of the board. Left of the resistors there are two 74LS244 or (better) 74F244 chips. Towards the centre of the board there are two 74*244 and two 74*373 (again LS or, better, F). Sixteen data lines should go from the 'left' memory banks to these chips. There should also be 10 multiplexed-address lines (MAD0-MAD9) going from the MMU (a PLCC chip in the forward left corner) to the DRAMs. As the lower 2MB appear to work, check especially the multiplexed address line MAD9; pins on the PLCC chips like the MMU sometime tend to loose contact. Also the control signals RAS1, CAS1L and CAS1H from the MMU to the two 74*244 in the front, and then, buffered by the '244s, through those resistors to the memory banks.

Check if some of the above is missing or badly done.

Yes, they are for EPROMs; if you upgrade TOS (e.g. to TOS 1.4, if you do not have it) you will have to use six 27C256 EPROMs. You will also have to change some jumpers and cut a trace on the motherboard (all in the front left corner of the board).

Yes [the left slot can be used for powering an expansion card], or for feeding an internal hard disk, or whatever. It is identical to the one used to feed power to the motherboard, i.e. it contains +5V, ground and +12V."

Sam F. asks for help with an 'extension cord' for his keyboard:

"I have a MegaST keyboard and Keith Scroggins' MegaST keyboard falcon adapter, which works great btw!!!!

Question #1: Can a phone line (such as that which connects a modem to the phone outlet) and a coupler be used to extend the length of the MegaST's cable?

Question #2: If that is not possible, what can I do?

I have re-cased my Falcon's motherboard in a large (30" I think) tower case, but the MegaST keyboard cable is definitely way to short to reach from the Falcon to the computer desk....help!!"

'Simon' tells Sam:

"A normal phone cable won't work as the MegaST needs all pins connected.

Sony Corp. said Thursday it will release the PlayStation Portable in North America on March 24 and have 1 million units ready for sale in the first week.

The PSP machine, a challenger to Nintendo Co.'s long-standing grip on the handheld video gaming market, will be sold as a "value pack" for \$250 in the United States and for \$300 Canadian dollars. It will include numerous accessories and for the first million sold a copy of the "Spider-Man 2" movie on the new Universal Media Disc format that Sony designed for the PSP.

Sony said it has already shipped 800,000 PSPs in Japan, where it went on sale on Dec. 12 for about \$190.

By comparison, Nintendo's newest product, the Nintendo DS sells for \$150. It was among the must-have Christmas gadgets, with more than 2.8 million sold worldwide since its release in late November.

The PSP is designed, however, with more multimedia features. It can play digital music, movies and display photos on its 4.3-inch color screen, using Sony's proprietary 1.8-gigabyte UMD discs or a Memory Stick.

With the PSP, the Tokyo-based electronics giant is targeting a wider consumer base and not just young gamers.

"It has gaming at its core, but it's not a gaming device. It's an entertainment device," Kaz Hirai, the president of Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. said in an interview.

In addition to working with its own Sony Pictures film division, Sony is in discussions with other movie studios to support the new UMD format for future releases of movies, Hirai said.

Sony said 24 game titles will be available around the time of the launch with prices starting at \$40 each.

According to market research firm DFC Intelligence, the DS and PSP are expected to drive the global portable games market from \$3.9 billion in 2003 to \$11.1 billion in 2007. The overall global video game industry saw sales of about \$23 billion in 2003.

Hard-core gamers will propel the initial sales of the PSP, analysts say. Its unique combination of gaming and multimedia features in a 7-inch by 3-inch device that also has Wi-Fi wireless connectivity, could spur a new market for Sony, however.

"When it comes to entertainment, Sony has advantages over other players in the market," said P.J. McNealy, analyst at American Technology Research. "But success drives imitation, and if this thing is a wildly successful platform, you'll see knockoffs by the holidays in 2006."

Xenosaga Episode II Ships For Playstation 2

Leading video games developer and publisher Namco Hometek Inc. announced its highly anticipated role-playing game, Xenosaga Episode II: Jenseits von

Gut und B?se, has shipped to North American retail outlets. Developed by Monolith Software Inc. in Japan, Xenosaga Episode II continues the celebrated story of Xenosaga Episode I: Der Wille zur Macht, which sold more than a million units worldwide. Exclusively for the PlayStation 2 computer entertainment system, Xenosaga Episode II is rated T for Teen and carries an MSRP at retail of \$49.99.

"Xenosaga Episode II is certain to captivate franchise fans and newcomers alike," said Yoshi Niki, Business Unit Director at Namco Hometek Inc. "The Xenosaga series truly embodies the role-playing genre, and we are proud to deliver gamers with a title that boasts both a sophisticated, compelling storyline and exceptional game play." Xenosaga Episode II brings players to a world thousands of years into the future, where war is rampant and humanity is battling for survival against a mysterious alien race known as the Gnosis. Incredible cinematics bring to life Xenosaga Episode II's epic storyline, which begins on Second Miltia with an elite cast of new and returning characters reaching the planet to recover the key to the Y-data hidden inside MOMO. Players must uncover the secrets surrounding the Miltian Conflict and delve further into the many unresolved questions and mysteries posed in Xenosaga Episode I.

Xenosaga Episode II features a fully customizable character growth system, allowing players to utilize more than 100 different skills such as Last Revenge, Overload and Double Power to equip characters with extraordinary abilities and overcome the most difficult situations. The game's enhanced battle system and refined boost system lets players execute devastating two-character "Double Attacks" including Archangel's Requiem, Fiery Ritornelle and the Gravity Bomb. With expansive worlds, fascinating characters and an engaging story, Xenosaga Episode II takes players on a philosophical journey filled with mystery, intrigue and surprise.

Gran Turismo4 for PlayStation2

Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. announced the North American release of Gran Turismo4, available exclusively for the PlayStation2 computer entertainment system. Developed by Polyphony Digital Inc. and following in the footsteps of the PlayStation 2 "Greatest Hits" title, Gran Turismo3 A-spec and a racing franchise that has sold more than 38 million units worldwide, Gran Turismo 4 further demonstrates its mission to provide the most authentic driving simulation available in the marketplace. The new features extend above and beyond just pure automotive racing, providing a unique destination for automotive and PlayStation 2 enthusiasts to enjoy car culture in every dimension - extending that goal is highlighted through the availability of more than 700 cars, up to 100 tracks and new modes such as "B-spec (Director mode)" and "Photo Mode." In addition, enhanced popular features will return with "Gran Turismo Mode" and "Gran Turismo Arcade Mode."

"With its broad appeal and large array of features highlighting car culture, we are excited to bring Gran Turismo 4 to market," said Susan Nourai, director, product and online marketing, Sony Computer Entertainment America. "Following up on an initial million unit plus launch in Japan, we have high expectations that Gran Turismo 4 will once again raise the bar for the racing videogame category here in North America."

Available for one to two players, as well as up to six players via LAN, Gran Turismo 4 offers an array of new features. These features include a

physics engine that incorporates real-life characteristics of the cars so that they are realistically designed and calculated to simulate the "real life" physics of that particular vehicle, taking into account weight, speed, friction, wind, and more. In addition, an all-new AI (Artificial Intelligence) engine is introduced allowing for behavior from opponents that present human-like reactions and emotions. Gran Turismo 4 continues to offer a refined replay mode with broadcast-quality graphics and now offers support for both High-Definition (1080i) and Dolby Pro Logic II. In addition to the use of the DUALSHOCK 2 analog controller, Gran Turismo 4 is compatible with the Logitech Driving Force Pro wheel, which allows the player to further enhance the automotive racing experience, and can be used for the entire game. Available in black with brushed aluminum accents, the Gran Turismo branded GT Force wheel provides a shifter for manual transmissions, 900 degrees of steering rotation and force-feedback. For more information, please visit www.logitech.com.

Arcade Mode

Players compete against each other or the artificial intelligence with select cars on select courses. Various gameplay modes are available that include "Single Race," "Time Trial," and multi-player for up to two players (single console) or six players via LAN-based gameplay. More cars and course are available in the GT Arcade Mode when they are unlocked in the Gran Turismo Mode.

Gran Turismo Mode

Via the GT World, players start from the bottom and race to earn money, unlock cars and courses, buy and sell cars and upgrade parts while competing in more than 200 various championship races. Upon entering the GT World, players have the option to visit the following Gran Turismo resort facilities:

- * My Home - the player's home and garage
- * Dealership Town - divided by continent, players can visit dealerships representing over 80 manufacturers from around the world.
- * Tuner's Village - players can visit famous tuning shops to upgrade their car(s).
- * Race Event Pavilions - players can visit and join various races.
- * License Center - players will have the opportunity to participate in various driving tests to earn licenses for access to various race formats.
- * Music Theater - players can enjoy various music from around the world.
- * Circuit Racing - players can visit the "suburbs" and enter races at various circuit tracks.
- * Mission Races - To experience the drama of racing at a new level, a new race style is structured as a mission-clearing based race event offering numerous variables for the player to capture the checkered flag.
- * New "High Score" System - The player who wins a race is not necessarily the one who captures the checkered flag, but graded on how well they drive and challenge themselves among the competition based on their car type, horsepower and modifications related to the race field.

B-spec Mode

Players take the role of a race team manager and provide direction to their driver (A.I.) to compete in races while viewed and directed through the

classic "broadcast-style" replay screen, on-board camera and race monitor screen. In B-spec mode, the player will have the opportunity to adjust various car settings for proper race setup, choose the difficulty level, which is also known as the "Pace Command," followed with direction on when to overtake competition and take pit stops where a variety of car settings can be adjusted to further progress in the race - from tires to the volume of fuel for refueling.

Photo Mode

Divided in two formats: 1) "Photo Drive" - players have the opportunity to photograph their car during the race where they can take advantage of zoom, depth of field and motion blur. 2) "Photo Travel" - Players can take their favorite car and travel around the globe to conduct photo sessions in exotic locations through a variety of angles. Once the photo is taken in the game, the player can save it to their memory card (8MB) (for PlayStation2) or a USB key and have the option to share with friends or print out a color copy via a USB printer. Up to 50 photos can be taken at one time.

General

In Gran Turismo 4, automobiles available for the player represent historically significant vehicles to popular cars of today and tomorrow. All vehicles are fully customizable from racing tires to gear ratio. New driver assist functions: In addition to anti-lock brakes, traction control systems and active stability control, Gran Turismo 4 includes active steering as well, further enhancing the safety features. In reflecting the latest car tuning trends, Gran Turismo 4 has the availability of superchargers and NOS. More than 50 courses are available in Gran Turismo 4 that encompass dirt/snow courses, world circuits, original circuits (tracks from previous Gran Turismo titles) and city courses covering both real-life and fantasy-based locales. Some courses can be played in reverse mode. Some courses include Nurburgring Nordschleife, New York City, the Grand Canyon, Tsukuba Circuit, and more.

The independent Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) has rated Gran Turismo 4 "E" for Everyone.

Electronic Arts Hit With Lawsuit on OT

Another worker has filed a class-action lawsuit seeking overtime from Electronic Arts, adding to the mounting evidence that more tech workers are disillusioned with jobs that entail 80-hour weeks, diets based on pizza and catnaps in the cubicle.

The case is at least the second such suit filed against Electronic Arts of Redwood City, the world's largest video game maker, and it's similar to one filed last year against Vivendi Universal Games in Los Angeles.

Legal experts say the case also adds to the number of class-action suits filed by Silicon Valley workers and others who feel entitled to overtime if they have little hope of winning the stock-option lottery.

'Five years ago the valley was a very different place," said Christopher Cobey, an employment attorney for Littler Mendelson in San Jose. 'The rewards were tangible and just there within your reach. The economic

climate has changed dramatically since then."

The lawsuits have exposed the bitter feelings among workers in the \$10 billion game industry. A survey by the International Game Developers Association cites rapid burnout by workers. An emotional blog by an EA "widow" on LiveJournal.com triggered thousands of sympathetic responses. And next month the developers association and the Game Developers Conference will hold a daylong "summit" in San Francisco examining ways to improve quality of life for game-industry workers.

"These cases bring to light the issues that have been bubbling under the surface of the game industry for some time," said Jamil Moledina, director of the Game Developers Conference.

Leander Hasty, a Culver City engineer for the company since June 2003, filed his suit Monday against Electronic Arts in state Superior Court in San Mateo. Hasty is seeking undisclosed back pay, damages and penalties for himself and fellow workers.

A spokesman for Electronic Arts, which rang up \$3 billion in sales last year and has 5,100 workers, did not return a phone call for comment Friday.

Since 2000, California labor law has exempted some professionals in the software industry from overtime regulations. Companies do not have to pay programmers overtime if they make more than \$41 an hour and engage in advanced work that is creative or intellectual in nature.

Hasty's lawyers contend EA's engineers should be eligible for overtime because they "do not perform work that is original or creative," have no management responsibilities and are seldom allowed to use their own judgment.

A similar suit filed in July by a 26-year-old lead programmer also argued that EA's game designers are entitled to overtime like image-effects workers in the film and theater industries, which are not covered by the exemption for the software industry.

Though he declined to comment specifically about the EA case, Vic Schachter, an employment law partner with Fenwick & West, said these cases illustrate that overtime rules designed to protect low-wage, low-skilled workers increasingly are being applied to high-paid, high-skilled tech jobs.

"Clearly this case rings a loud bell for valley companies that they need to take a serious look at the issues," Schachter said.

One reason behind the increase in overtime suits is that many workers feel the maturing game industry is taking advantage of their passion to create the next "Sims" or "Super Mario," said Jason Della Rocca, executive director of the International Game Developers Association.

Workers didn't gripe during the tech boom because they figured that's what it took to get a shot at hefty royalties or stock-option windfalls. Today there seems to be little chance of a jackpot, yet bosses still demand six-day workweeks for months at a stretch.

"Managers are too willing to perpetuate that mentality that existed in the early days of the industry, and it really doesn't exist any more," Della Rocca said. "This isn't a cottage industry any more. When you're one employee of 5,000 and there's no real sense that your passion will

necessarily be rewarded, that gets into the gray area of exploitation."

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

UN Panel Aims to End Internet Tug of War by July

A U.N.-sponsored panel aims to settle a long-running tug of war for control of the Internet by July and propose solutions to problems such as cyber crime and email spam, panel leaders said on Monday.

The panel, set up in December 2003, will lay groundwork for a final decision to be taken in Tunis in November at a U.N.-sponsored World Summit on the Information Society, where global control of the world wide web may be decided.

Right now, the most recognizable Internet governance body is a California-based non-profit company, the International Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN).

But developing countries want an international body, such as the U.N.'s International Telecommunication Union (ITU), to have control over governance - from distributing Web site domains to fighting spam.

"There is an issue that is out there and that needs to be resolved," said Nitin Desai, chairman of working group and special adviser to U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

Incorporated in 1998, ICANN oversees management of the Internet's crucial addressing system which matches numerical addresses to familiar Web site addresses.

While its oversight has been confined to technical matters, critics say that it is subject to U.S. political influence.

The ITU, a 138-year-old trade body that among other things established country code rules for international telephone calls, is seen by developing countries as being better able to address their needs.

All countries want to counter spam - unsolicited commercial messages that can flood email accounts by the hundreds and burden the web with unwanted traffic.

E-Mail Scams Claim Homeland Security Ties

Federal authorities are investigating two e-mail scams, including one targeting families of soldiers killed in Iraq that claim to be connected to

the Homeland Security Department.

The scams "are among the worst we have ever encountered," Michael J. Garcia, director of the department's Immigration and Customs Enforcement bureau, said Friday.

Both of the online pleas for help and money link themselves to the bureau.

In one scheme, e-mail sent to families of U.S. soldiers killed in Iraq include a link to the bureau's Web site. The e-mail seeks to recover money from a friend of the slain soldier.

In the other, the e-mail identifies itself as being sent by a federal agent trying to track down funds looted from the Iraqi Central Bank by Saddam Hussein's son. The e-mail also links to the bureau Web site and asks for confirmation of the recipient's address by urging, "There is a very important and confidential matter which I want us both to discuss."

Garcia called both e-mail campaigns "bogus" and urged people to ignore and delete them.

"Most troubling is the fact that some are targeting the relatives of U.S. soldiers killed in Iraq," Garcia said in a statement. "We are also concerned about the fact that these criminals are impersonating ICE agents and referring to ICE's official Web site in an effort to steal money from Americans who have lost loved ones."

Agents of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement bureau were withdrawn from Iraq in March 2004, the agency said.

The bogus e-mails resemble the so-called "Nigerian letter." In that persistent scam, victims are presented with an opportunity to receive nonexistent government money, often from the "Government of Nigeria," as long as they pay a fee often characterized as a bribe to that government.

FBI Warns Users of E-mail Virus Hoax

The Federal Bureau of Investigation issued a warning to the public today, noting that a mass e-mail scheme has been launched using the FBI as an alleged sender.

The e-mail, which purportedly comes from an fbi.gov address, tells recipients that their Internet use has been monitored by the agency's Internet Fraud Complaint Center and that the user has been accessing illegal Web sites.

The user is directed to open an attachment that supposedly contains questions about the recipient's browsing history. The attachments contain a virus, according to the FBI's release, but the agency did not specify what type or variant it might be.

The FBI is investigating the matter and urges recipients of the hoax e-mail to report incidents to the Internet Fraud Complaint Center.

Until the hoax developer is found, the FBI is encouraging the public to exercise caution in opening unsolicited attachments. The agency also has suggested that e-mail users might simply exercise some common sense.

"Recipients of this or similar solicitations should know that the FBI does not engage in the practice of sending unsolicited e-mails to the public in this manner," the agency says in a statement.

Although users have been cautioned in the past, the hoax currently exploiting the FBI name is likely to have at least part of its intended effect, says Symantec Security Response senior director Vincent Weafer.

"E-mails from authority figures or large institutions tend to carry more weight in people's perceptions," he said.

That is one of the reasons that e-mails from financial organizations initially were so effective. Other tactics have included appeals for aid after the recent tsunami, purportedly from well-respected volunteer organizations.

Messages that are strongly worded, as with the fake FBI warning, are also popular, since they prompt users to respond quickly. "People are afraid they've done something wrong, so they might act without thinking about it," Weafer said.

New Sober Worm Spreading Quickly

A new version of the Sober worm wriggled out of its hole early on Monday and set about quickly attacking computers in Europe and the U.S., a security services company says. The worm is a mass-mailer, meaning it spreads itself via e-mail using contacts listed in the address books of computers it infects.

The first instance of the worm, called W32.Sober-K-mm, was intercepted by U.K. security company MessageLabs. The company detected 663 instances of the worm in the first hour, and the figure climbed quickly to more than 2,200 instances over the next five to six hours, prompting MessageLabs to give it a high-risk rating, says Maksym Schipka, a senior antivirus researcher with the company.

"Compared to other Sober worms, it looks to me like this one is spreading itself more aggressively," he says.

The latest variant appears to have originated in Germany, and by midmorning on Monday it had also been detected in France, the U.K., and the U.S. It may have been created by the same hacker that wrote the first version of the Sober worm, which appeared in October 2003 and also originated in Germany, Schipka says.

"I'm not aware that the source code for this worm was made public. It is written in Visual Basic which makes it more difficult to reverse engineer the virus than if it were written in C++ or Assembler. So it would be logical to assume it is the same virus writer," he says.

W32.Sober-K-mm spreads itself as an e-mail attachment and creates random subject lines and body texts in either English or German, depending on the e-mail addresses it gathers. Subject lines observed so far include "Alert! New Sober worm," "Paris Hilton Sex Videos," "You visit illegal websites," and "Your new Password," according to MessageLabs, in Gloucester, England.

The worm can also generate fake messages that try to fool the recipient into opening the attached.zip file. Some e-mails purport to be from an antivirus company offering a security patch against a new version of the Sober worm--when in fact they contain the worm. Others pretend to be from the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation and include an attachment labeled "indictment," Schipa says.

When a user opens the attachment the worm creates several executable files with the names csrss.exe, winlogon.exe and smss.exe. It then modifies the registry key Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Run so that the files execute on startup.

The worm also displays the contents of part of the infected machine's file system in a notepad document. Schipka says it is not clear yet why this document appears and that it may be a bug in the worm. "Sober is known as being relatively buggy," he says.

The notepad file may be a sign that the virus writer is experimenting with new techniques, one observer speculated.

Such worms can make the computers they infect sluggish to operate and also clog e-mail servers and networks. Users are advised to update their antivirus software to keep the definition files current.

Congress Revs War on Spyware

Despite the latest efforts by Microsoft Corp. and other tech companies to fight spyware, U.S. lawmakers are more determined than ever to pass a legislative fix.

Two opposing anti-spyware bills are battling it out in the House as senators draft their own bill. The technology industry has lobbied diligently against the anti-spyware legislation, arguing that regulation could outlaw legitimate uses of downloadable software, such as security patches. Also, pointing to the negligible impact of the CAN-SPAM Act of 2003 on reducing the volume of unsolicited e-mail, many companies tried to persuade Congress to allow technology to combat spyware. However, as popular ire continues to grow against the insidious Internet programs, lawmakers are poised to act.

"We expect to have a bill on the floor very quickly," Rep. Joe Barton, R-Texas, chairman of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, said last week, adding that he hoped the legislation would be taken up by House and Senate conferees in the spring.

To make legislation more palatable to industry, a bill introduced in January by Rep. Mary Bono, R-Calif., was amended last week by the House subcommittee that oversees consumer protection. The bill bans keystroke logging, Web-page hijacking and undeletable unsolicited ads. It also requires a conspicuous notice to users before monitoring software is downloaded, and it requires that users opt in. The amendment approved last week would ensure that cookies are not outlawed and that embedded ads are not subject to labeling.

Despite the changes made to the Bono bill last week, the industry largely prefers an alternative measure sponsored by Rep. Bob Goodlatte, R-Va. There remains considerable concern that software programs that update and monitor

programs to improve service could be ensnared in a notice-and-consent law. Rather than requiring notice, the Goodlatte bill focuses on malicious uses of interactive software, the harm caused by spyware and criminal penalties.

On the other side of the Capitol, Sens. Conrad Burns, R-Mont.; Ron Wyden, D-Ore.; and Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., are drafting a new version of their SPY BLOCK (Software Principles Yielding Better Levels of Consumer Knowledge) bill, which won committee approval last session, sources said.

Britain Launches Internet Virus Alert Service

Britain launched a Web site on Thursday aimed at helping computer users avoid damage from Internet viruses and other online threats.

The government-funded IT Security Awareness for Everyone site (www.itsafe.gov.uk) will give free advice on data protection and issue virus alerts to those who sign up.

"There is a clear need for easy-to-understand and simple, independent advice for non-technically minded people who use computers," Home Office Minister Hazel Blears said in a statement.

E-mail or text alerts will direct users toward step-by-step guides on how to deal with any problem. The site will use information provided by the National Infrastructure Security Co-ordination Center (NISCC).

More than half of UK households had a home computer in 2002, according to the Office for National Statistics.

In the third quarter of 2004, 52 percent of UK households could access the Internet from home, compared with just nine percent in the same quarter of 1998.

EBay Sued in California Over Bidding Practices

EBay Inc. is being sued by a Pennsylvania man who charges that it illegally forces up prices when certain high bidders raise their maximum bid to guard against last-minute offers, an attorney for the plaintiffs said on Wednesday.

In a proposed class-action lawsuit filed Feb. 17 in Santa Clara County Superior Court, lead plaintiff Glenn Block claims that eBay raised his bid from \$111 to \$112.50 after he responded to an e-mail from auction site that said he was the highest bidder for an item.

The email warned that he could be outbid if he did not increase his maximum.

Block alleged that he could have won the auction at \$111, and accused eBay of forcing him to overpay by \$1.50.

"Based on what we know about what's being alleged, it appears the plaintiff completely misunderstands the functionality of the eBay bidding system," eBay spokesman Hani Durzy said. He said the company had not yet seen the

lawsuit.

Durzy told Reuters that eBay only notifies winning bidders that they could be outbid when they have hit their preset maximum bid. Increasing a maximum bid is voluntary.

eBay automatically increases bids only when the maximum has been hit and when the prior top bid was between bidding increments. For example, bidding increments on items priced between \$100 and \$249.99 is \$2.50. Block, however, raised his bid increment by \$1.50.

Durzy says eBay discloses such information on its Web site.

Plaintiffs' attorney Reed Kathrein, of Lerach Coughlin Stoia Geller Rudman & Robbins equated eBay's actions to "shill bidding," and said it forces bidders to bid against themselves.

Shill bidders are often in cahoots with sellers and work to artificially raise the price of auction items they have no intention of buying.

Kathrein said eBay and its PayPal online payments unit receive larger transaction fees as a result of the company's alleged shill bidding.

He said eBay's actions have created substantial unlawful profits for eBay and its online payment unit PayPal. He said required restitution would run in "excess of tens of millions, if not hundreds of millions, of dollars during the past four years."

Hotmail Glitch Snarls Pay Service

About 200,000 customers who pay Microsoft Corp. for premium Hotmail e-mail accounts have been experiencing problems including slowdowns and an inability to access some e-mails, the company said Friday.

The problems began Tuesday and were being resolved Friday, said Brooke Richardson, lead product manager for Microsoft's MSN online division. Richardson said the glitch was caused by a server problem, and that the system was not attacked.

Earlier this week, some customers who pay for services such as Hotmail Plus and MSN Premium complained that they couldn't see some e-mails, had trouble logging in and were experiencing slowness. Richardson said no data was lost, but some people were temporarily unable to access all their e-mails.

By Friday, Richardson said the situation had "stabilized" but some customers were still experiencing slowness. She said it wasn't yet clear when the situation would be completely resolved.

Redmond-based Microsoft has about 190 million Hotmail customers, mostly using the company's free service.

Court Won't Block Low-Cost Ink

Lexmark International has suffered a setback in its bid to use the Digital

Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) to prevent other companies from making low-cost, refurbished toner cartridges for its printers.

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit has ruled against Lexmark's request that it reconsider an earlier decision that favored Lexmark's opponent in the case, Static Control Components (SCC), a maker of components used by third parties to make refurbished cartridges.

The earlier decision allowed SCC, in Sanford, North Carolina, to continue selling its chips for Lexmark laser printers at least until the case came to trial, expected later this year. Lexmark had asked the appeals court for a hearing to reconsider that decision, but the appeals court turned down its request on February 15, SCC announced this week.

The case has been closely watched in the industry, where printer manufacturers make much of their profit through sales of their own cartridges. Refurbished cartridges typically sell for about 30 percent less than those from the major printer vendors.

Lexmark filed its suit against SCC in December 2002, accusing it of violating copyright law as well as the DMCA. It alleged that SCC's Smartek chips include Lexmark software that is protected by copyright. The software handles communication between Lexmark printers and toner cartridges, and without the software refurbished toner cartridges will not work with Lexmark's printers.

A district court granted Lexmark a preliminary injunction in the case in February 2003, preventing SCC from selling the chips until the case is resolved at trial. But that ruling was overturned eight months later by the appeals court, which said, in part, that copyright law should not be used to inhibit interoperability between one vendor's products and those of its rivals. The appeals court upheld its decision last week.

Printer makers strongly encourage their customers to buy cartridges directly from them, but Lexmark went a step further by using technology to lock out products made by third parties.

The move attracted critics, such as the Electronic Frontier Foundation, which accused Lexmark of abusing the intent of the DMCA at the expense of consumers. The law was intended primarily to protect digital content such as music and films, those critics argued.

A ruling from the U.S. Copyright Office in October 2003 appeared to bolster SCC's case. Without referring directly to Lexmark, the Copyright Office said the DMCA does not block software developers from using reverse engineering to access digitally protected copyright material if they do so to achieve interoperability with an independently created computer program.

SCC was quick to portray last week's appeals court ruling as a win for all consumers.

"We feel that the public interest has been served by a knowledgeable court to not allow a greedy [printer manufacturer] to use the law to perpetuate an electronic monopoly. Consumers and justice have been served," says Ed Swartz, SCC's chief executive officer, in a statement.

Lexmark has said that it is merely acting to protect its intellectual property, which it spends millions of dollars on every year to develop. It notes that it offers a cartridge return program that provides customers with a discount if they agree to return their toner cartridge to Lexmark

when it is empty.

"We expect that this case will take a long time to resolve given the complexities of the issue. However, we continue to be very confident in our position regarding the infringement of our intellectual property," the company says in a brief statement.

The case is expected to go to trial in December.

Lawsuit Says HP Printer Cartridges Die Before Use

A Georgia woman has sued Hewlett-Packard Co., claiming the ink cartridges for their printers are secretly programed to expire on a certain date, in some cases rendering them useless before they are even installed in a printer.

The suit filed in Santa Clara Superior Court in northern California last Thursday seeks to represent anyone in the United States who purchased an HP inkjet printer since Feb. 2001. HP is the world's No. 1 computer printer maker.

An HP spokesman said the company does not comment on pending litigation.

HP ink cartridges use a chip technology to sense when they are low on ink and advise the user to make a change. But the suit claims those chips also shut down the cartridges at a predetermined date regardless of whether they are empty.

"The smart chip is dually engineered to prematurely register ink depletion and to render a cartridge unusable through the use of a built-in expiration date that is not revealed to the consumer," the suit said.

The suit, which seeks class-action status, asks for restitution, damages and other compensation.

U.S. Cracks Down on At-Home Work Scams

Make big bucks at home stuffing envelopes! Or designing Web sites! Or assembling refrigerator magnets! That last come-on attracted an estimated 30,000 people, the government said Tuesday, announcing a crackdown on some 200 scam operations that falsely offered lucrative work-at-home and other questionable business opportunities.

Such schemes cheated tens of thousands of people out of more than \$100 million, officials said.

Worse news: They said they can't even estimate how many other such scams are out there.

In a 14-month-long crackdown on promoters of illegal business opportunity and work-at-home schemes, the Federal Trade Commission, Justice Department, U.S. Postal Inspection Service and law enforcement agencies from 14 states took civil and criminal action against more than 200 operations they said engaged in fraud and/or violated consumer protection laws, officials said

at a news conference.

Such offers succeed partly because they "appeal to the optimist in all of us ? be your own boss, supplement your income, pay for your child's education," said FTC Chairman Deborah Platt Majoras. The reality, she said, is that many are scams promising results that will never happen.

And victims who lose money they invested in some of the businesses are unlikely to ever get it back, said Peter D. Keisler, assistant attorney general in the Justice Department's civil division.

Some people spent up to \$37,500 per machine to invest in a plan to own DVD movie rental vending machines. The company selling them, American Entertainment Distributors of Hollywood, Fla., allegedly said annual earnings from the machines would be \$60,000 to \$80,000 and that it would help buyers place them in good locations. The FTC alleges the company misrepresented how much help it would give franchisees.

The estimated 30,000 people who signed with National Home Assemblers of Mainesburg, Pa., to make kitty cat refrigerator magnets had to pay \$38 for registration and starter kits and a \$12 inspection fee. They were promised up to \$800 weekly pay, but in most if not all cases, their work was later rejected for "quality reasons," authorities said.

Neither company could be reached for comment. Directory assistance had no number for the entertainment company and the phone was disconnected at the assembling company.

The multi-agency enforcement crackdown, known as "Project Biz Opp Flop," meant the government agencies cooperated with each other to investigate and eventually file criminal prosecutions or civil actions, get cease-and-desist orders and so on.

For example, in Florida, the FTC, Justice Department and Postal Inspectors office recently worked with the local U.S. attorney to hit 14 people with such criminal charges as money laundering and wire fraud.

The state is "one of the consumer fraud capitals of the country, if not the world" because of its high population of immigrants and of senior citizens with nest eggs, said Marcos D. Jimenez, U.S. attorney for the Southern District of Florida.

Elsewhere, judges issued restraining orders against companies that were promising business opportunities such as the chance to make \$500 a week doing medical billing from home, designing and setting up Web sites for Fortune 500 companies or selling surplus or discontinued merchandise.

Some of the people running the scams received jail terms, others fines. Not all the 200 of the companies have been shut down.

The agencies involved did not provide details on exactly how many companies had been shut down nor how many people were jailed or fined.

The job of catching questionable schemes offered through ads, the Internet and the mail is daunting. Consumers must be wary, study offers well and get opinions from professionals such as lawyers and accountants, officials said.

The FTC has started a Web site to educate consumers who use the Internet to find business opportunities. It can be found, along with a list of

companies the government has taken actions against, at <http://www.ftc.gov>.

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